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KAUAI NEWS

State officials promise action on Wailua-Kapa'a traffic fixes

By Lester Chang - The Garden Island

WAILUA — Apparently growing as weary of looking at traffic studies as Kauaians are of sitting in Kuhio Highway traffic in Kapa'a and Wailua, state officials have promised quick action on proposed short-term traffic fixes for East Kaua'i.

Rod Haraga, head of the state Department of Transportation, said he and his staff are focusing their energies on implementing quick-fix traffic solutions for Kaua'i at this time, and that he was tired of looking at traffic studies.



Rod Haraga

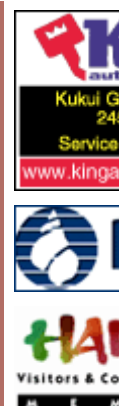
"This administration (of Gov. Linda Lingle) is about doing and not about talking," Haraga said.

Haraga and other top state DOT officials announced efforts to carry out "short-term solutions" as soon as possible to alleviate long-standing traffic congestion on Kuhio Highway through Kapa'a and Wailua.

Adding a fourth highway lane in front of the Coco Palms Resort and a second lane to a former sugar cane haul bridge makai of the highway bridge over the Wailua River, turning Papaloa Road by Wailua Bay into a one-way, two-lane, northbound route, and creating two southbound lanes near that road, could all happen if supported by the public and funding becomes available, DOT leaders reported at a meeting at the Aloha Beach Resort-Kauai Wednesday night.

But Bob Bartolo, the outgoing president of the Kapaa Business Association, stressed that traffic congestion remains dire, and wanted those proposed improvements and others to be developed sooner rather than later.

"With the increases in population and the number of cars traveling on the road, it has to happen sooner or later," Bartolo said. "It is just that we are asking for it to happen sooner, the widening of the road (in front of the Coco Palms Resort) and the additional lane on the bridge."



Building the "Pouli feeder road" from the highway mauka to the temporary Kapa'a bypass road would also help significantly, Bartolo said. The road would allow those on the bypass road to get to the Waipouli shopping centers without having to access congested Kuhio Highway.

Steve Kyono, who heads the DOT Highway's Division office on Kaua'i, said he too would like to see a significant reduction in traffic congestion through such improvements.

But aside from the Pouli Road improvement, Kyono said in general there was no funding for the design and planning and construction for most of the key improvements proposed at this time.

Members of the Kapaa Business Association, which Bartolo said represented the majority of businesses in Kapa'a, and the Kapaa Rotary Club, invited Rodney Haraga, the administrator of the DOT, Brannon Morioka, the director of the Highways Division of the DOT, and Kyono to the meeting to discuss the status of traffic-relief projects.

In a position paper distributed at the meeting, members of the Kapaa Business Association said they want state officials to consider three "short-term solutions" they contend would "dramatically improve" traffic flow on Kuhio Highway from Kapa'a to Wailua.

They include: □ Widening Kuhio Highway from the southern exit or entry of the temporary Kapa'a bypass road to Kuamo'o Road by the Wailua River;

Adding a second lane to the cane-haul bridge located immediately makai of the Kuhio Highway bridge over the Wailua River;

- Expediting the development of the Pouli Road extension.

That Pouli Road extension would go over land owned by movie star and singer Bette Midler, and if built soon, would bring significant traffic relief almost immediately, probably faster than the other two proposed short-term solutions advanced by the Kapaa Business Association, Bartolo said.

"We have met with Bette Midler, her people, and they said 'OK' to the suggestion," Bartolo said during the meeting.

Kyono said that idea has merit, and that it may be possible to build the road with just state funds.

But the drawback is that the project would be "competing intensely with other projects in the state that are using just state funds," Kyono said.

Among 70 persons attending the meeting was state Sen. Gary Hooser, D-Kaua'i-Ni'ihau.

Hooser noted that at the request of the Kapaa Business Association, the state Legislature appropriated funds in 2003 for the planning and design of the Pouli Road project.

Members of the state Legislature also budgeted funds for extension of Olohena Road in the Kawaihau District, he said, adding, "those monies are still available and waiting to be used."

Bartolo said it was his understanding that \$3 million had been set aside for the Pouli Road project, but that the funds had not been released.

Using state and federal funds may be a more fiscally-prudent way to build that road extension, Kyono said. The federal funds would help stretch state dollars, Kyono said.

He said state DOT officials must comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 to secure the federal funds. The act is part of a national policy to encourage a productive and harmonious relationship between

man and his environment, and, among other tasks, sets out to promote efforts to prevent or eliminate damage to the environment.

The Pouli Road extension project may have stood alone at one time, but it and the proposed addition of a fourth Kuhio Highway lane in front of the Coco Palms Resort have been incorporated into the government's "transportation system methodology program," Kyono said.

He said the program considers "interim measures before you build out the Kapa'a Relief Route," a major alternate road DOT officials and consultants are proposing in Wailua to alleviate traffic congestion in East Kaua'i.

Kyono also said DOT leaders are considering adding a fourth lane to Kuhio Highway in front of the Coco Palms to help move traffic through Kapa'a and Wailua more efficiently.

But the construction of the project will depend on the availability of funds and time, he said.

"If we do the EA (environmental assessment), that will take a year. The design will take another year," he said. The work could be completed by 2010, he said.

The addition of another lane on the cane-haul bridge also is being considered at this time, Kyono said.

Kyono said another way to ease traffic flow is to turn Papaloa Road into two north-bound lanes, and to build two southbound lanes mauka of that county road.

As an interim "quick fix," the state will complete the resignalizing of lights on Kuhio Highway through Kapa'a and Wailua by the end of this year, Kyono said.

All of the proposed improvements should help ease traffic congestion in East Kaua'i.

Rod Haraga

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